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**Commission on Population and Development**
**Forty-eighth session**
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**General debate on national experience in population matters: realizing the future we want — integrating population issues into sustainable development, including in the post-2015 development agenda**

## Statement submitted by Awaz Centre for Development Services, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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## Statement

AWAZ Centre for Development Services (AWAZCDS-Pakistan) and Rutgers WPF Pakistan, in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, working for the recognition and promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights in Pakistan, welcome the theme of the forty-eighth session of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development "Realizing the future we want: integrating population issues into sustainable development, including in the post-2015 development agenda".

It is a time for reflection for states, as the process of designing new development commitments is being finalized in form of the post-2015 development agenda and Sustainable Development Goals — SDGs. The ICPD Programme of Action, adopted with consensus by 179 Governments in Cairo in September 1994, marked the beginning of a new chapter in the intergovernmental discourse on the interrelationship between population, human rights, sustained economic growth and sustainable development. The landmark agreement was made with a promise to protect human rights, with special emphasis on reproductive health and rights; to invest in health and education; to advance gender equality; and to empower women and young people by providing equal opportunities to all. After the major paradigm shift brought by ICPD, the Millennium Development Goals ushered a new era of development priorities. MDGs originally did not build on the gains made for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), but tried to rectify the original exclusion of SRHR by incorporating MDG 5b "universal access to reproductive health".

Independent reviews of these frameworks and recent consultative process on the post-2015 development framework argue that progress in many areas has been unequal and fragmented, however at the same time new challenges and opportunities have emerged. Many people continue to live in a context of discrimination and inequality, and human rights are not fully realized for all. The goal of gender equality still appears elusive, with gender-based discrimination and violence continuing to affect millions. Large and persistent gaps remain between the most advantaged and marginalized populations, especially with respect to access to sexual and reproductive health rights and services.

In Pakistan, 65 per cent of the population is comprised of young people that illustrates a major potential for a fledgling nation, provided that the government demonstrates political leadership and ensures compliance to the ICPD Programme of Action. We need to harness the potential of adolescents and youth in Pakistan who are the key future resource for sustainable development by being key agents of social change.

However, young people and their needs remain socially excluded. The assumption that boys and girls under 18 are "too young" to need sexual and reproductive health information and services ignores the realities and environmental factors and keeps young people from acquiring practical knowledge and skills they need to protect themselves from abuse, exploitation and disease. They continue to bear the brunt of sexual and reproductive health burdens, which in turn makes them vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation, unintended pregnancy, unsafe abortion and STIs, maternal morbidity and mortality. These are formative years for young people and the lack of necessary information and services translates into unhealthy behaviour and in turn unsure emergence into adulthood.

In Pakistan, the most common form of victimisation of women and girls is with regards to their sexual and reproductive health and the most common violation of the rights of women and girls is that of their sexual and reproductive rights. Women and girls have constrained decision-making and reduced life choices; contraceptive prevalence is also extremely low especially among married adolescents; they are ill equipped to face livelihood demands and they frequently experience domestic violence. According to the Pakistan Demographic Health Survey (PDHS) 2013 only 35.4 per cent of women between the ages of 15 to 49 are currently using any method of contraception; PDHS 2007 states that the maternal mortality rate stands at 276 per 100,000. According to the research carried out by the Punjab Welfare Department and Social Welfare Department, around 42 per cent of women accepted violence as a part of their life. It is estimated that 70 to 90 per cent of women suffer from domestic violence with approximately one woman being raped every two hours. This alarming situation cannot be rectified without addressing the root causes that stem from violation of SRH rights of women and girls.

The ICPD's Programme of Action and commitments for further action have continued to champion the cause of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights of young people and women. Therefore it is unfortunate that the United Nations Secretary-General Synthesis Report on post-2015 has no explicit reference to the outcome of the ICPD Operational Review. Furthermore, the synthesis report contains elements of grave concern when it comes to Pakistan. The document mentions womens' reproductive health and rights, but not those of adolescents and young people. Additionally, the document contains no reference to the sexual health of women and young people. Therefore in the context of Pakistan it is crucial that the sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights that are part of two goals (health and gender) in the Open Working Group outcome document must be retained and further strengthened by the inclusion of sexual rights in the post-2015 development framework.

Although the post-2015 framework will be universally applicable, the targets will be set at a national level. Therefore we demand that the national targets set for Pakistan should place a key focus on young people and women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. We have developed the following recommendations to make this possible:

(a) Federal and provincial endorsement and implementation of quality, evidence-based life skill based education (LSBE) programmes that provide accurate information on human sexuality, gender equality, human rights, relationships, and sexual and reproductive health for both in- and out-of-school youth that is relevant to each specific age group.

(b) Legislation for women's protection and empowerment in all provinces of Pakistan, including laws against child marriages, domestic violence and other harmful traditional practices.

(c) Inclusion of women and young people's sexual and reproductive health needs in the formal and informal health structures of the federal and provincial governments.